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Sustainable development and international economic cooperation: First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty

Observance of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty (1996) and recommendations for the rest of the Decade

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. The World Summit for Social Development, held at Copenhagen in March 1995, was the widest gathering of Heads of State and Government on social issues and was noted for the specific nature of commitments made and the call for national and international action on the three key themes of full employment, poverty eradication and social integration. Commitment 2 of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development reads, in part, "We commit ourselves to the goal of eradicating poverty in the world, through decisive national actions and international cooperation, as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind".[1]

2. At its fiftieth session, the General Assembly, on 20 December 1995, adopted resolution 50/107 on observance of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty (1996) and proclamation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006). A number of activities throughout the United Nations system were organized in observance of the Year, with the overall theme "Poverty can be and must be eradicated throughout the world".

3. At its fifty-first session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 51/178 of 16 December 1996, in which it decided that the theme for the Decade would be "Eradicating poverty is an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind". In paragraph 6 of the same resolution, the Assembly decided that the theme for 1997 within the Decade would be "Poverty, environment and development". That issue received extensive consideration at the special session of the Assembly held in June 1997. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its fifty-second session on the overall assessment of the implementation of the programme for the observance of the Year, taking into account progress being made in the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development, including recommendations for possible actions and initiatives in relation to the Decade.

4. Poverty eradication has become a widespread theme of deliberation throughout the United Nations system. In particular, both the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank have proclaimed poverty alleviation as their dominant objectives. The UNDP Human Development Report 1997[2] focuses entirely on the poverty issue, and makes an eloquent case for the feasibility of eradicating poverty in the not-too-distant future. The United Nations Report on the World Social Situation 1997[3] contains an exhaustive treatment of the current trends and a detailed discussion of the policy actions needed to attack poverty. These two seminal documents on poverty should be read in conjunction with the present document. The present report touches upon important sectoral trends, examines the main obstacles to further progress on poverty and makes some suggestions with regard to activities in the United Nations for the rest of the Decade (1997-2006). The report also draws heavily upon existing United Nations reports. One of the objectives of the present report is to make available in a single document selected references to material relevant to poverty.

II. Recent trends in poverty eradication and social expenditures

5. The Report on the World Social Situation 1997 points out that while the relative incidence of poverty in developing and transition countries declined from 30.0 per cent in 1987 to 29.5 per cent in 1993, the number of the world's poor rose from 1.23 billion to 1.31 billion. The overwhelming majority of people living on $1 a day or less are located in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Indochina, Mongolia, Central America, Brazil and China.[4] There is much concern that at present levels of economic growth, especially in the low-income countries, and with continued restraint on social expenditures, there is little possibility of making any significant dent in poverty levels in the years to come. If anything, the number of people living in poverty is likely to rise, especially in Africa.

6. However, the situation is not consistently unfavourable, for poverty reduction has in recent years been noted in the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia and East Asia and the Pacific, including China. In some countries the progress has been quite remarkable, mostly in South-East and East Asia. The Human Development Report 1997 proclaimed that in the past 50 years poverty had fallen more than in the previous 500. High and sustained levels of economic growth, guided significantly by a vibrant public sector and accompanied by high investment in the private sector, attention to agriculture and heavy social expenditure, especially on education, have been the key, along with a strong commitment by the political leadership to demonstrate progress on the poverty front.

A. Overall trends in key sectors

7. Recent trends in key sectorial social indicators are assessed in this section. The primary sources of information were the Report on the World Social Situation 1997 as well as the Human Development Reports 1996 and 1997.

1. Education

8. Education: In a world of more intense local transactions and advances in technology, increasing emphasis is placed on education as a key sector in the fight against poverty. Recent decades have witnessed a major expansion in education, but considerable gaps remain: worldwide enrolment since 1960 in primary and secondary schools has risen from an estimated 250 million children to more than 1 billion. Enrolment in higher education has more than doubled, increasing from 28 million in 1970 to more than 60 million today.

9. The regions of East Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean in 1995 attained net enrolment in primary education of over 90 per cent, and South Asia and the Arab States reached 80 per cent, but sub-Saharan Africa had a long way to go, with only about 61 per cent enrolment.

10. Enrolment in secondary education remains unsatisfactory despite progress: developing countries as a whole increased gross enrolment ratios from 42 per cent in 1990 to only 46 per cent in 1993 (with sub-Saharan Africa having increased from 22 per cent to only 23 per cent). Those figures are far from the 95 per cent enrolment rate in the industrialized and transition countries. All in all, the gap between the developing and developed countries in the duration of compulsory schooling remains significant: in most developing countries, education is compulsory for four to nine years, while in the developed countries, it is compulsory for at least eight years (10 in the United States of America, 11 in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and 12 in Germany).

11. As regards the gender gap, in a majority of countries even today the illiteracy rate of women is significantly higher than that of men. In 61 countries, the gap between the male and female adult literacy rates is estimated to be greater than 10 per cent, and in 40 countries it is estimated to be greater than 20 per cent, according to the World Education Report 1995.[5] The report goes on to note that although the absolute number of illiterate adults appears to have levelled off globally, it is still increasing, notably in sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States and South Asia, with women forming a substantial majority in each case.

12. Progress among the signatories to the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs, adopted at the World Conference on Education for All, held at Jomtien, Thailand, in March 1990,[6] was assessed at a meeting of the signatories in June 1996. The key conclusion reached at the meeting was that there had been "significant progress in basic education, not in all countries nor as much as had been hoped, but progress that is nonetheless real". It was emphasized that "the priority of priorities must continue to be the education of women and girls".[7]

2. Health

13. According to the World Health Organization (WHO),[8] life expectancy for both sexes continued to improve globally, reaching 65 years by 1996 (63 for men and 67 for women). But in 50 countries, life expectancy was under 60 for both sexes. Progress had been especially good in Asia and in the developed countries. However, in sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Eastern Europe, life expectancy had actually decreased.

14. In its World Health Report 1997,[8] WHO raises an important issue for the future, i.e., that dramatic increases in life expectancy, combined with profound changes in lifestyles, are leading to global epidemics of cancer and other chronic diseases. The number of cases of cancer and diabetes in developing countries is expected to at least double during the next 25 years. Such predictions are bound to add to the burden of health on societies, especially in the low-income countries. They also highlight the importance of the need for a continuous search for cost-effectiveness in health delivery systems while also devoting more resources to health in developing countries.

3. Hunger and malnutrition

15. There is reason to take limited satisfaction from progress on many fronts as far as hunger and malnutrition are concerned. Dietary energy supplies have increased since the early 1970s in all regions of the world except Eastern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa.

16. In the developing world as a whole, the absolute number as well as the proportion of undernourished in the fell between 1969-1971 and 1990-1992, but in 30 countries that percentage increased. All in all, about 840 million people in the developing world were undernourished in the early 1990s. The situation was worst in sub-Saharan Africa (where the number of undernourished people doubled between 1969-1971 and 1990-1992, affecting 43 per cent of the total population in 1990-1992).

17. Participants of the World Food Summit, held in Rome in November 1996, adopted the Rome Declaration on World Food Security and the World Food Summit Plan of Action, in which they reaffirmed the commitment to eradicating poverty and inequality, renewed the world's commitment to attacking hunger and malnutrition and adopted a target to reduce the number of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015. A mid-term review is to be held to ascertain whether it is possible to achieve that target by 2010. A notable related initiative is the 2020 Vision for Food, Agriculture, and the Environment launched by the International Food Policy Research Institute. In its annual report it foresaw a fairly good situation in the years to come if rates of investment in agricultural research and development were maintained.[9] Concern has been expressed recently on the decline in the share of official development assistance (ODA) dedicated to agriculture. This trend urgently needs to be reversed.

B. Social expenditures

18. A determined combat against poverty will require a significant increase in social spending (including for population programmes) as part of public expenditures. Most of that increase would need to come from domestic sources, but in the case of low-income countries, ODA is crucial (see below). The Human Development Report 1997 estimates the additional cost of combating poverty at about $40 billion a year. Most developing countries' public expenditures still constitute a relatively small proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) – unlike in the industrial countries; the percentage of national income that goes into public expenditure in developing countries averages about 20 to 30 per cent of GDP.

19. Thus, the effort against poverty will require a significant increase in public expenditure as a ratio of overall GDP in a large number of developing countries. The history of poverty eradication in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries is largely a history of the rise of public social expenditures. (In the OECD countries public expenditures as a ratio of GDP average 40 to 60 per cent, with equivalent levels of taxation.) Social progress in developing countries will also require progressively higher levels of taxation. As a proportion of GDP, taxes in developing countries are usually only about 10 to 20 per cent, one half the level in industrial countries.

20. The anti-poverty effort will also require a switch of resources to the social sectors. Currently, the overall ratio is relatively low in developing countries: central government spending on health and education, for example, as a share of the total averaged about 20 per cent for 61 developing countries for which data are available.

21. The future of the poverty eradication effort in the developing countries will revolve not only around overall economic growth but also around how those ratios evolve in relation to economic growth. Higher economic growth will allow greater absolute and proportional government expenditures on social services. However, under current approaches to government spending there will continue to be much downward pressure on public social spending. Recent international discussions on development issues embody a basic contradiction: developing countries are enjoined on the one hand to reduce the role of the State and government expenditures, and on the other to pay more attention to social sectors and poverty eradication.

22. For those developing countries where economic growth is forecast to be reasonably high, government spending on social services can increase with relative ease. The public sector will need to absorb a larger proportion of GDP to cater to growing social demands and poverty eradication. But this will also require higher levels of taxation in those countries.

23. In countries where economic growth is slated to be low, especially in low-income countries, a serious dilemma is in store. Poverty eradication will require nothing less than the reinvigoration of economic growth. It would be unrealistic to expect social progress without such accelerated growth. Only accelerated growth would make possible a significant increase in social spending. In a low-growth situation, the ability to raise resources through taxation would be highly restrained. In such countries, additional ODA, as well as debt relief will be critical if poverty eradication is to be meaningful (see below).

III. Obstacles to progress on poverty

24. Two years after the World Summit for Social Development it is difficult to be optimistic about the prospects for poverty eradication within a reasonable period of time in a large number of developing countries. This is true despite the significant progress being made in many developing countries where there is reason to be optimistic about further progress.

A. Economic growth and employment

25. Probably the single most important restraint on poverty eradication is the relatively low level of world economic

growth and the especially low level of growth in the low-income countries. Notwithstanding the recent optimistic estimates of world economic growth based on a modest increase in its tempo, the long-term trend is hardly encouraging: global economic growth, according to data furnished by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the United Nations, declined from 5.3 per cent in the 1960s to 3.7 per cent in the 1970s to 2.9 per cent in the 1980s and to 1.4 per cent in the first half the 1990s, with perhaps a better performance in sight for the rest of the decade.[10] It is often forgotten that at the beginning of the decade, the world economy experienced four consecutive years of declining per capita incomes. This is a major contributing factor to the widespread high unemployment and underemployment, which in turn is the single most direct cause of poverty. According to International Labour Organization estimates, a total of 700 million to 800 million people throughout the world are unemployed or underemployed.

26. The relegation of high growth and employment levels to a lower political priority than in earlier decades (e.g., in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War) is a major reason for pessimism in the fight against poverty. Unless policies and attitudes towards higher growth and full employment are changed, there is little hope for a significant dent in poverty levels. (It is now almost forgotten that the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade laid down an indicative target of about 6 per cent economic growth for developing countries.) In recent years, attention has shifted to overall "supply-side" policy approaches to growth; target rates have fallen somewhat out of fashion. That is regrettable, for it implies the loss of a benchmark against which world economic and development performance and effort can be measured.

27. There are now isolated signs of some changes in attitude. But a much greater change in the trend is required. The task is basically political. But such a change towards higher growth and employment would need to be supported by a significant increase in global savings and investment, an increase in productivity and the channelling of a substantial portion of savings to the slower-growing parts of the world. It is encouraging that, according to the International Monetary Fund, world savings as a percentage of GDP are predicted to increase from 22.4 per cent in 1982-1989 to 24.3 per cent in 1998-2001. The increase in developing countries is considerably more robust than in the industrial countries, but remains critically low in the least developed countries.

28. A concerted effort is therefore required for policies to encourage a higher level of savings and investments in both the developed and developing countries and to increase their efficacy. A reversal of the decline in savings in the industrial countries needs to be elevated as a major policy goal, and a more substantial portion of those savings should be channelled to a wider range of developing countries, especially the low-income countries. (As part of that process, advanced countries such as the United States, which is a net consumer of global savings, need to revert to the more normal position of being net suppliers of savings to the global pool.) Furthermore, the outflow of resources from developing countries – a somewhat neglected subject in recent years – needs to be looked at. As financial markets have liberalized, the channels for outflow of resources from developing countries – both legal and illegal – have multiplied. Financial outflows are reinforced by a continuing substantial drain of qualified technical people from the developing countries to the industrial countries.

B. International economic cooperation

29. If the lower-income countries are to benefit from a higher level of inflows, they need to be in the form of higher levels of ODA and debt relief. The industrial countries need urgently to reverse the decline in ODA to developing countries. According to OECD,[11] total ODA by members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee amounted to just 0.27 per cent of their combined gross national product, the lowest figure recorded since comparable statistics began in 1950. There is little to indicate a reversal of the trend in the near future.

30. The causes for the decline in ODA need to be more clearly understood, and some related myths dispelled: (a) Fiscal pressures in the industrial countries have much to do with the decline, but ODA as a ratio of OECD countries' total budgets is still very small; (b) Much misinformation persists about the ineffectiveness of aid. While there are no doubt failures in the aid saga, the success stories, especially in South-East and South-East Asia, which were early beneficiaries of aid, are now well-documented but insufficiently publicized. The discussions on the fiftieth anniversary of the Marshall Plan did highlight some of the successes of foreign aid. Many developing countries have undertaken drastic measures to improve domestic policies, which has increased the chances of aid being used more effectively in some countries. The substantial increase in private flows to developing countries may have somehow led to the notion that aid is now less necessary. But it bears

repeating that private flows to developing countries are geographically and sectorally limited. Even in these beneficiary countries the need for concessional flows to infrastructure, agriculture and social sectors is still significant. But in low-income countries the need for ODA remains particularly high. Indeed, the total demand for ODA in the developing world is rising, not declining.

31. Enhanced ODA flows will not have the desired impact if the low-income countries, and indeed many middle-income developing countries, have to wrestle with high debt burdens. Recent debt alleviation measures have helped many countries, but many of those measures not only do not go far enough, but also will take a long time to be fully implemented. Indeed, even when fully implemented, the debt burden will continue to weigh heavily on too large a number of developing countries. Regardless of the publicity given to recent measures to alleviate the debt of developing countries, their total debt has risen relentlessly, from $1.8 trillion in 1993 to $2.2 trillion in 1996.[12]

32. Regrettably, the political momentum for debt relief has now subsided, especially since commercial banks now perceive little threat on the debt front. There is room for rejuvenating a major initiative on debt relief to lead to a more lasting solution.

33. In general, there needs to be a renewed international agreement in favour of concessional finance (ODA and debt relief) for a large number of low- and middle-income developing countries as part of a global framework to address global problems, which have been identified in a number of social and environmental areas. But the fundamental logic for such transfers should continue to be that a higher level of global prosperity is desirable for all countries and that this requires a degree of solidarity on the part of the rich in favour of the less privileged.

34. As regards trade measures, a large number of developing countries have undoubtedly benefited from the overall liberalization of trade in the industrial countries. But by now it is widely agreed that much more remains to be done in further opening up markets to exports of developing countries, especially to those items that are of particular interest to them. Furthermore, a large number of developing countries, especially the low-income ones, that do not have the supply capacity nor the infrastructure to support an export orientation, have either not benefited from the aftermath of the Uruguay Round or may even be adversely affected.

35. Thus, much remains to be done, including in areas that would encourage agricultural exports from developing countries and the export of labour-intensive manufacturers and semi-manufacturers from low-income countries. A related issue is the improvement of commodity markets and prices. The Human Development Report 1997[2] draws attention to the stark fact that for developing countries as a group, the cumulative terms-of-trade losses amounted to $290 billion between 1980 and 1991, much of it due to a decline in commodity prices.

C. Globalization

36. An important aspect of the current discussion on poverty relates to the phenomenon commonly referred to as market-driven "globalization", probably more accurately described as "transnationalization". Much positive impact on economic growth is claimed by proponents of globalization, but there are at least two serious sets of concerns relating to poverty that have arisen to which there are no effective responses in sight.

37. First, with the predominant emphasis on market-driven economic advancement, there is a widespread feeling that the moral and ethical framework of the world economy is changing dramatically. A certain emphasis on human solidarity is being lost. A most articulate proponent of this thesis, the internationally known financier George Soros, recently made this trenchant remark: "... laissez-faire capitalism holds that the common good is best served by the uninhibited pursuit of self-interest. Unless it is tempered by the recognition of a common interest that ought to take precedence over particular interests, our present system is liable to break down."[13] The international community has no effective response to this fundamental dilemma and many others that have an impact on the fight against poverty. The feeling cannot be avoided that poverty eradication efforts in this new atmosphere face an even more uphill battle than before.

38. One particular aspect of globalization that has recently attracted some attention is the growing inequality in income and wealth both nationally and internationally. To a certain extent this is a result of the prevalent approach to economic policies that call for a reduction in the role of the public sector. To a certain extent it is also a result of the inability of all countries and all sections of society to benefit equally from the frequent technological and other changes that are part of the process of globalization.

39. Growing inequalities are not only a major contributor to poverty, but also, in a vicious circle, a major obstacle in the fight against poverty. The General Assembly needs to give some consideration to reviving the issue of growing inequalities at the international level.

40. Second, the globalization paradigm includes a greatly enhanced emphasis on "competitiveness", especially in the private sector and, in a different sense, in the public sector. The private sector, under the unrelenting competitive pressures emanating from deregulation, the rapid fall of trade barriers and rapidly advancing technologies, has had to undertake severe cost-cutting measures. Not only has this led to greater unemployment – transitory in some cases, but structural in many others – but corporations have also had to retrench on workers' benefits, with inevitable negative consequences on social progress. The widespread weakening of trade unions has not helped. Where low-paying jobs have been created especially in the service sectors, social benefits have been diluted or sometimes altogether eliminated. The impact on poverty can only be negative. The private sector in developing countries is also having to adapt to the intense exigency of competitive pressures. At the public level, tax cutting has become part of this ethos, even while in country after country evidence is mounting that income and wealth inequalities have increased. In other words, there is a widespread decline on the part of the economically fortunate to share with the unfortunate.

41. The public sector is under a somewhat different kind of competitive pressure. With the globalization of finances, the prevailing sentiment in the global financial markets requires Governments not only to cut down on deficits – often to arbitrarily low levels – but also to cut down on the overall role of the public sector altogether. The pressure on the social sector has become especially unbearable. The bond market, for example, which has become a major arbiter in national macroeconomic policies, is highly sensitive to the relative size of the public sector deficit. It has the effect of imposing an iron discipline on the public sector. This would be acceptable if additional revenues were sought from existing or new sources, but such is not generally the case.

42. Very serious thought needs to be given to the rather contradictory message that is conveyed to Member States, and more pointedly to the developing countries. They are enjoined on the one hand to hold back public expenditures and on the other hand to fight poverty boldly and to upgrade human resource expenditures, not to mention attending to environmental needs.

IV. Suggestions for the rest of the Decade

43. In declaring the Decade, the General Assembly naturally had in mind several objectives: to highlight the problems of poverty and to raise awareness of the issues; to instigate international and national action to eradicate poverty; and to impose a certain time-frame within which action would be taken and the impact measured.

A. Highlighting and raising awareness of the problems of poverty

44. The issue of poverty has now gained global attention thanks to the World Summit for Social Development and the prominence given to the issue by the United Nations in general, UNDP, the World Bank and more recently OECD. It is now the subject of a multitude of sometimes excessive and repetitive reports, seminars and workshops.

45. Within the context of the United Nations, poverty and poverty-related issues are at the core of deliberations in a wide range of funds, programmes and specialized agencies, which are sometimes somewhat uncoordinated. To a certain extent, poverty has become a proxy for development issues in general, especially as they relate to the low-income countries.

46. At the international level, it is proposed to strengthen progressively the observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (17 October). Hitherto it has been a somewhat limited affair. It is proposed that the Day be marked by attention to a particular theme that the General Assembly chooses for the specific year in question. (For 1998, the theme will be "Poverty, human rights and development".)

47. More attention needs to be devoted at the national level to highlighting the observance of the Day. It is proposed to involve the United Nations system offices in each country in organizing events and discussions on the national poverty issues. In many countries information on national poverty is not sufficiently known, nor is the determination that exists at the international level to address poverty issues.

B. Action at the national and international levels

48. So far, response at the national level to poverty issues identified at the World Summit for Social Development can be said to have been somewhat weak. The Copenhagen Declaration requires the formulation of national targets and plans of action to move towards national poverty eradication targets. According to the Human Development Report 1997, only about 30 countries have formulated targets. The importance of national targets needs to be restated: they can be important rallying points for discussion and action, as well as benchmarks for evaluating action.

49. Much activity in the United Nations funds and programmes and at the World Bank has focused on preparing national-level analyses and reports. Below is a summary of what has been accomplished so far by three key organizations:

(a) UNDP. In his annual report for 1996, the UNDP Administrator stated that as part of the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, by the end of 1997 more than 100 countries would have national human development reports.[14] While these have multiple objectives, it would be useful to have all national human development reports serve as the basis for national targets and action on poverty eradication. In the aftermath of the Summit, UNDP has also initiated projects under the rubric of "poverty strategies initiatives" in about 60 countries.

(b) The World Bank. Poverty reduction now has a more prominent place in the activities of the World Bank. The basis for action is the national poverty assessments, 84 of which had been completed by June 1996.

(c) UNICEF. In its progress report on follow-up to the World Summit for Children, it is stated that by the end of 1996, 167 countries had signed the Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children adopted at the Summit, and 155 had finalized or were in the process of finalizing their national programmes of action. Some 50 countries had formulated substantial programmes of action and a further 26 were planning to do so.[15]

50. This increased emphasis on studies related to poverty can only be welcomed by the General Assembly. But several issues need attention: first, the task of compiling national reports on poverty needs to be completed. Second, it would seem necessary to prepare synthesized reports for each country on the basis of the inputs listed above from different parts of the United Nations system and, where useful, from non-governmental organizations and academic sources. Third, it is important to increase the role of targets and specific action plans in these activities. Fourth, it would be important to monitor progress at the national or the subregional level.

51. The possibility of more action at the subregional level needs to be further explored. Many subregional entities have secretariats that are close to the member States and that could act as catalysts for action. Furthermore, subregional groupings offer a useful forum for peer review of policies and progress, somewhat along the lines of donor performance reviews by the OECD countries. Some initiatives have already been launched by the Secretariat in that direction.

52. At the international level, within the context of the General Assembly's deliberations on the Decade, it may be desirable to focus on national and international action in alternate years. Furthermore, it is proposed that each year the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty be the occasion for an independent examination of the theme chosen by the Assembly for that year. For example, the theme for 1999 could be dedicated to "Poverty eradication lessons from industrial countries". The year 2001 could be dedicated to "Poverty eradication and resource flows to and from developing countries"; 2003 to "Poverty eradication and trade of low-income countries"; and, finally, 2005 to "Poverty eradication and technology".

53. In the intervening years, it is proposed that attention be dedicated to national issues related to poverty eradication. It cannot be emphasized enough that unless adequate leadership is asserted at the national level, consensus brought about and adequate resources dedicated at the national level, no amount of international cooperation will help. It will be recalled that the World Summit for Social Development required every Member State to declare poverty reduction targets. Thus, by the year 2000, when a special session of the General Assembly is to be held to review the implementation of the recommendations of the Summit, the Assembly should get a full report on the enunciation of national targets from as many developing countries as possible. Beyond that, the yearly themes emphasizing national policies could perhaps be designated on the following basis: 2002, "Poverty and planning of social expenditures"; 2004, "Poverty, job creation and education"; and 2006, "Poverty, health and nutrition".

C. Targets and monitoring

54. Both UNDP and the World Bank now have strong monitoring activities on poverty at the national level. These need to be better publicized, coordinated with the rest of the United Nations system and more closely geared to the objectives of the World Summit for Social Development. But

this requires a somewhat more activist involvement of the Secretariat as well.

55. It should be noted that recently OECD agreed upon a poverty reduction target requiring the halving of absolute poverty by 2015. This is a positive development, and the United Nations needs to work closely with the OECD secretariat in monitoring the process. It could have the great merit of persuading donor countries to channel resources to those areas that need them.

V. Conclusions

56. In general, the picture regarding poverty eradication is mixed: impressive progress is being made in large parts of the developing world; almost unprecedentedly, a large mass of human beings is being lifted out of poverty in East and South-East Asia. But the rest of the developing world is making nowhere near that level of progress, and given current policies, the absolute number of poor people may actually rise.

57. The chief obstacles to the poverty eradication effort are low growth in a large number of countries, the relatively low priority now given to high growth and full employment and the macroeconomic policies that emphasize curtailment of the public sector and public expenditures.

58. Finally, a case has been made for completing national and subregional efforts to assess poverty and to instigate poverty eradication action with the assistance of the United Nations system and donor countries. That effort needs to be coordinated further and geared more closely to the commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development.

Notes

[1] Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.8), chap. I, resolution 1, annex I.

[2] United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 1997, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997.

[3] Report on the World Social Situation 1997 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.97.IV.1).

[4] Ibid., part two, chap. VI, para. 35.

[5] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, World Education Report 1995, Paris, UNESCO Publishing/Oxford, 1995.

[6] Final Report of the World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs, Jomtien, Thailand, 5-9 March 1990, New York, Inter-Agency Commission (UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank) for the World Conference on Education for All, 1990, appendices 1 and 2.

[7] Education for All: Achieving the Goal: Final Report of the Mid-decade Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All, Amman, Jordan, 16-19 June 1996, Paris, UNESCO, 1996.

[8] World Health Organization, The World Health Report 1997: Conquering Suffering, Enriching Humanity, WHO, Geneva, 1997.

[9] International Food Policy Research Institute, 1995 Report, Washington, D.C., 1995.

[10] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Statistical Pocket Book, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.II.D.32).

[11] Michel, James H., Development Cooperation: 1996: Report, Paris, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1997.

[12] Global Development Finance 1997, Washington, D.C., International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1997.

[13] Soros, George, "The Capitalist Threat", Atlantic Monthly, February 1997, p. 48.

[14] DP/1997/16, annex III.

[15] E/ICEF/1997/14 and Corr.1 and 2.

Annex

Selected recent literature on poverty-related issues

This annex includes a select list of poverty-related literature not cited in the notes.

Commission on Human Rights, "Final report on human rights and extreme poverty" (E/CN.4/SUB.2/1996/13).

The Equity Gap: Latin America, the Caribbean and the Social Summit (first regional conference in follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, São Paulo, 6-9 April 1997), Santiago, 1997 (LC/G.1954 (Conf.86/3)).

"Globalization and Liberalization: Effects of International Economic Relations on Poverty" (UNCTAD/ECDC/PA/4/Rev.1).

Poverty Reduction and the World Bank: Progress and Challenges in the 1990s, Washington, D.C., World Bank, 1996.

Preventing and Eradicating Poverty: Main Elements of a Strategy to Eradicate Poverty in the Arab States, New York, United Nations Development Programme, 1997.

The Progress of Nations 1997, New York, United Nations Children's Fund, 1997.

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